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Summary record of the 59th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 5 p.m.

Agenda item 17: Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments (*continued*)

(g) Appointment of members and alternate members of the United Nations Staff Pension Committee (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/11/Add.2 and 3)

1. **The Chairman** recalled that at its 24th meeting the Committee had decided to postpone the election to fill the two remaining vacant seats, one to be filled by the Group of African States and one by the Group of Asian States, in the United Nations Staff Pension Committee. He invited the Committee to take action on the vacancy to be filled by the African States. In that connection the Committee had before it two notes by the Secretary-General in documents A/C.5/52/11/Add.2 and Add.3, in which the Secretary-General communicated to the General Assembly the names of two persons nominated by their respective Governments for appointment to the United Nations Staff Pension Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 1998. In view of the endorsement of the candidacy of Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo (Uganda) by the Group of African States, the Government of Benin had informed the Secretariat that it would not insist on the candidature of Mr. Akplogan.

2. He took it that the Committee wished to take a decision by acclamation.

3. *It was so decided.*

4. *The Committee decided to recommend the appointment of Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo (Uganda) to the United Nations Staff Pension Committee.*

Agenda item 125: Financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/L.30)

Draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.30

5. **Mr. Hanson-Hall** (Ghana), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.30 on the financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, said that the draft resolution resulted from informal consultations in which all delegations had shown great statesmanship.

6. *Draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.30 was adopted.*

7. **Mr. Zahid** (Morocco) requested that the explanation provided in the informal consultations should be recorded in the Committee's summary records.

8. **Ms. Laheurte** (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) said that in Security Council resolution 1133 (1997), the Secretary-General had been requested to begin the identification of eligible voters in accordance with the Settlement Plan. During the preparations for the resumption of the identification process, in November 1997 the Acting Special Representative had informed the two parties that the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) planned to open 12 centres in all, 9 of which would function concurrently, in accordance with paragraph 6 of the November 1997 report of the Secretary-General (S/1997/882). In paragraph 4 of his January 1998 report (S/1998/35), the Secretary-General referred to the arrangements which had been initiated by MINURSO to start the identification process in Mauritania and Morocco to reach the planned total of nine centres operating concurrently. In that context, it had initially been envisaged that two centres would operate in southern Morocco, at Tan Tan and Goulemine, but because many members of non-contested tribes resided in northern Morocco, the Secretary-General had concluded, as noted in paragraph 30 of the January 1998 report, that it would be more practical to convoke and identify them in the northern part of the country. The Secretary-General had therefore decided that the identification sessions initially scheduled to take place in Tan Tan and Goulemine should be held at two northern locations, El Kelaa des Sraghna and Sidi Kacem. That had been a purely practical, operational decision to facilitate the identification of applicants from non-contested tribes resident in northern Morocco. The decision did not in any way prejudge any decision by the Secretary-General or the Security Council about persons from non-contested tribes wishing to participate in the referendum.

9. **Mr. Mesdoua** (Algeria) said that the Committee had not had to consider the political aspects of the issue; it was responsible for financial and budgetary questions, and there were other bodies in which the political aspects were taken up. Paragraph 30 of document S/1998/35 clearly referred to a decision taken by the Secretary-General; in that decision, the Secretary-General had never used the word "centres". The decision had been taken on a temporary and exceptional basis. Two identification teams, from Tan Tan and Goulemine, would go to the northern part of Morocco to carry out a temporary mission.

10. **Mr. Zahid** (Morocco) said that when the Secretary-General had referred to a decision to identify candidates from non-contested tribes in two localities, he had, of course, meant centres. The identification process would take place in United Nations centres, with United Nations teams, not necessarily from the south of Morocco. Nine centres would

operate concurrently, there were two additional centres, and the total number might reach 12 or even more if the Secretary-General considered it necessary in order to activate the process. Morocco had asked for more centres because it wanted the process to be completed as soon as possible. It was prepared to make available to the United Nations the resources to open centres in northern Morocco because of the large number of applicants. Any opposition to the establishment of centres was an attempt to delay the identification process.

11. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had made good progress, and should respect the agreement it had reached in adopting draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.30. The substantive issues could be dealt with in other forums; the Committee was concerned only with the financing of MINURSO.

12. **Mr. Mesdoua** (Algeria) said that his delegation had shown great flexibility. It had accepted paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, even though that paragraph was somewhat lame, in order to save time and avoid complications. His delegation's objective was to give firm support to MINURSO, to the implementation of the Settlement Plan and the Houston agreements within the prescribed time limits, and to the organization of a referendum on self-determination for the Saharan people.

13. **Mr. Zahid** (Morocco) said that paragraph 5 was not lame, and had been supported by delegations. His delegation had asked for the explanation provided by the Secretariat to be repeated at the formal meeting so that it would be clear to everyone, including Algeria.

Agenda item 118: Joint Inspection Unit (*continued*)

14. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee wished to recommend to the General Assembly that it should defer consideration of agenda item 118 to the second part of the resumed fifty-second session.

15. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 143: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (*continued*)

16. **The Chairman** said that the importance of an oversight mechanism could not be overstated. It was very important that the mechanism should be efficient and effective and should serve the interests of the Organization in the best possible way.

17. He took it that the Committee wished to recommend to the General Assembly that it should defer consideration of agenda item 143 to the second part of the resumed fifty-second session.

18. *It was so decided.*

The meeting was suspended at 5.30 p.m. and resumed at 7.10 p.m.

Agenda item 114: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/L.31)

Draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.31

19. **Mr. Armitage** (Australia), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.31, expressed the hope that it would be adopted by consensus.

20. **Mr. Niwa** (Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) said that the Secretariat would do its best to comply with the request that the revised procurement manual should be published no later than 31 March 1998.

21. **Ms. Achouri** (Tunisia) said that the French text of part B, paragraph 2, needed to be brought in line with the English text.

22. **Ms. Letrot Hadj Hamou** (France) noted that in paragraph 22 of the French version of draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.31, the fourth line should read "*qui lui ont été présentés*", and suggested that the last line should be replaced by "*et de rapporter à l'Assemblée générale via le Comité consultatif*" to bring it into line with the English text.

23. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that in paragraph 29, line 2, the wording that had been agreed on in the informal consultations was "fifty-third regular session" rather than "fifty-third session", to make it clear that the reference was to the period between September and December 1998.

24. **The Chairman** said that the same meaning could be conveyed by the use of the expression "main part of the fifty-third session".

25. *Draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.31, as orally revised, was adopted.*

26. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the adoption of the draft resolution. Procurement reform and outsourcing practices were of concern to the Group of 77 and China. The roster of suppliers should be established and contracts awarded on as wide a geographical basis as possible, taking into account the particular interests of the developing countries.

27. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the structural aspects of the procurement system, especially the

issue of posts, should have been handled by the Secretariat. Under the resolution just adopted, the Secretary-General would carry out a comprehensive review of the organizational structure of the Procurement Division, including the post of Chairman of the Headquarters Committee on Contracts. The role of that Committee in reducing procurement-related arbitration cases as much as possible should be emphasized.

28. **Mr. Kuznetzov** (Russian Federation) expressed satisfaction at the adoption of the draft resolution, to which his delegation attached great importance. There had been little progress during the previous four years in the area of procurement reform, but the situation now looked more promising. The question of arbitration had hitherto been particularly unsatisfactory; the General Assembly had asked the Secretary-General to report at its fifty-second session on arbitration cases, but no report had been submitted, while questions raised by various delegations had gone unanswered or had received unhelpful responses. It was to be hoped that the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) would implement paragraph 24 of draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.31 on a priority basis, so that the Secretary-General could report on procurement reform in general, and arbitration in particular, at the fifty-third session.

29. **Mr. Demir** (Turkey) emphasized the importance of procurement reform and outsourcing practices. Competitive bidding should be at the heart of the procurement process, and, in order to foster competition, all invitations to tender should be posted on the Procurement Division's website home page and circulated to permanent missions. The roster of suppliers should be used efficiently and with a view to increasing the procurement of goods and services from suppliers in developing countries. It was regrettable that the revised Procurement Manual had not yet been issued.

30. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that in view of recent reductions in procurement functions at Headquarters, there could be no justification for the proposed reclassification of the post of head of the Procurement Division to the D-2 level. His delegation was concerned at the number of high-level posts that were being created within the Organization.

31. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) pointed out that in paragraph 15 of the draft resolution just adopted, the expression "other intergovernmental institutions" was ambiguous. In the informal consultations it had been suggested that the practice of the World Bank, specifically, should be taken into account, and he asked that that should be borne in mind in the preparation of the report referred to in the paragraph. The resolution included various time limits and deadlines that had not been set by the General Assembly, but, rather, had been taken from the Secretary-General's report; it was to be hoped that they represented a commitment on the part of the Secretary-General.

32. **Mr. Hanson** (Canada) said that, in his delegation's view, the proposed reclassification of the head of the Procurement Division was fully justified owing to the prospect of increased responsibilities opened up by paragraphs 14 and 15 of draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.31.

33. **Mr. Saha** (India) said that the first priority was the production by the Procurement Division of reports within the specified time limits. The proposed reclassification was of secondary importance.

34. **The Chairman** noted that the timely production of documentation was of the utmost importance, and he urged the Secretariat to bear that fact in mind.

Agenda item 116: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (*continued*)

Integrated Management Information System (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/L.32)

Agenda item 115: Programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 (*continued*) (A/C.5/52/L.33)

Draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.32

Draft decision A/C.5/52/L.33

35. **Mr. Riva** (Argentina), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.32 and draft decision A/C.5/52/L.33, urged their adoption by consensus.

36. **Ms. Letrot Hadj Hamou** (France) suggested that in the last line of paragraph 10 of the draft resolution, the words "*afin d'éviter dans la mesure du possible des frais inutiles*" should be replaced by "*afin de limiter les paiements non justifiés*", in order to bring the French version into line with its English counterpart. Paragraph (b) (ii) of the French text of draft decision A/C.5/52/L.33 referred to an amount of $2.3 million, which should be corrected to $1.3 million. She suggested that in the first line of paragraph (c) of the French text, the words "*afin de financer les activités*" should be replaced by "*dans la perspective de financer les activités*", to bring the French version into line with the English text.

37. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) said that, in paragraph 9 of draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.32, the reference should be to paragraphs 25 and 27 of the annex to the report and not of the report itself.

38. *Draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.32, as orally amended, was adopted.*

39. *Draft decision A/C.5/52/L.33 was adopted.*

40. **Ms. Fahmy** (Egypt) speaking in explanation of position on draft decision A/C.5/52/L.33, thanked the representative of Argentina for his efforts to secure a consensus. Her delegation had joined the consensus despite its belief that the additional resources required for the Integrated Management Information System could have been provided from the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 instead of from the unspent balance for the biennium 1996-1997. It had also joined the consensus on the understanding that the decision adopted by the Committee would not prejudge the report that the General Assembly had requested from the Secretary-General in its resolutions 51/167 and 52/220 on the utilization by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development of the savings realized in the budget for the biennium 1996-1997. It was important that the Secretariat should submit that report to the General Assembly at the second part of its resumed fifty-second session and that consideration of the report should be included in the agenda for the fifty-third session.

41. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan), speaking in explanation of position on draft decision A/C.5/52/L.33, said that the unspent balance from the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 could not automatically be used for the IMIS project; on the contrary, it should in principle be returned to Member States in accordance with the Financial Regulations. However, his delegation had voted in favour of the draft decision so that it could be adopted by consensus. The question of the disposal of the remaining surplus should be considered at the main part of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

42. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that she would have preferred to see provision for the IMIS project included in the 1998-1999 budget, but had voted in favour of the draft decision so that it could be adopted by consensus. The improvement and refurbishing of conference facilities represented a valid use of unspent funds, as did the financing of UNCTAD activities. She reiterated her delegation's request for information from the Secretariat on the recruitment of personnel, which information should be made available without delay.

43. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services), referring to comments made earlier in the week by the Under-Secretary-General for Management, said that he would like to clarify the issue of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) computerized management information system, which, in 1989, the United Nations had intended to customize for its own use. Because of cost considerations, however, the United Nations had subsequently decided not to adopt that system. The FAO system had been implemented between 1989 and 1990, and was still in operation. Early in 1996, however, the FAO had decided to launch a new project to replace it.

44. **The Chairman** said that he trusted that the Secretariat officials concerned had taken due note of the representative of Cuba's request for information.

Agenda item 119: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/52/829)

45. **The Chairman** proposed that the Committee should recommend that the General Assembly, recalling paragraph 26 of its resolution 52/214 B of 22 December 1997, in which it expressed deep concern about the technical and audio quality of some conference rooms, and requested the Secretary-General to present proposals in order to ensure all necessary resources for the upgrading of those conference rooms, including the interpretation booths, having considered the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document A/52/829, on the measures to ensure the necessary resources for the upgrading of conference rooms and interpretation booths: (1) should decide to authorize the amount of $1.3 million for the upgrading of conference rooms 4 and 5 and to charge the expenditures against the overall balance of appropriations for the biennium 1996-1997 to be retained (as an exception to the provisions of Financial Regulations 4.3, 4.4 and 5.2 (d)); (2) should request the Secretary-General to ensure that the refurbishment of those conference rooms was completed as soon as possible during the biennium 1998-1999.

46. He would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft decision.

47. *It was so decided.*

48. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to a draft decision proposed by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning documents related to the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names that were issued by the Secretariat. The Committee would recommend that the General Assembly should decide, without prejudice to the relevant rules of procedure governing the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, that the documents related to that Conference, which were issued by the Secretariat, should be translated into the six official languages.

49. He would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft decision.

50. *It was so decided.*

51. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in explanation of position, said that the adoption of the decision was fully consonant with the principle of equality among languages. His delegation thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for his cooperation in that regard and for his successful efforts to expedite the completion of the summary records for the previous session.

52. **The Chairman** said that in view of the concerns which members had expressed he would reiterate to the Office of Communications and Public Information (OCPI) the need for the staff responsible for the preparation of press releases to be assigned on a continuous basis in order to permit them to develop the expertise required to report effectively on the often technical subjects that were discussed by the Fifth Committee.

53. On the question of documentation in general, he wished to propose that the Committee should recommend that the General Assembly should note that documents were not being submitted as required under paragraphs 24 and 25 of General Assembly resolution 52/214 B and emphasize that the provisions of those paragraphs should be fully implemented.

54. He would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft decision.

55. *It was so decided.*

Organization of work

56. **Mr. Saha** (India) noted with satisfaction that the Committee had concluded its deliberations without having had to convene any previous night meetings. He hoped that the work programme for the next part of the resumed session would take account of the lessons learnt during the current part of the session.

57. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, voiced concern over the Committee's failure to take action on certain issues, owing to the late issuance of reports by the Secretariat. He requested the Secretariat to ensure that all reports to be considered by the Committee during the following part of the resumed session were made available to delegations in a timely manner.

58. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) regretted the Commitee's failure to take action on certain items, including the issues of gratis personnel and the use of consultants, because of the Secretariat's failure to complete the relevant reports on time. He hoped that that situation would not be repeated at the next part of the resumed session and that the provisions of paragraphs 24 and 25 of Assembly resolution 52/214 B would be respected.

59. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that the postponement of so many items on the Committee's agenda imposed undue hardship on the delegations of small developing States. He hoped that in the future adequate time would be allotted for the consideration of all items that had been included in the agenda. He was also concerned at the growing tendencies to link items which should be considered individually and on their own merits and to address correspondence to individuals rather than to delegations, as the representatives of Governments. He hoped that those two trends could be nipped in the bud.

60. **Mr. Watanabe** (Japan) said that his delegation supported the comments just made by the representative of Uganda. Little had changed in the Committee's working methods during the current part of the resumed session and he looked forward to more substantive improvements during the next part of the resumed session. He hoped, finally, that Japan's recent payment of $187 million would help to alleviate the financial crisis which the Organization was currently experiencing.

61. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that her delegation also supported the views expressed by the representative of Uganda and was equally concerned over the number of items whose consideration had been deferred.

62. **The Chairman** said that he had prepared a draft paper on the working methods of the Committee as a first step towards addressing the concerns which many delegations had expressed on that subject. He looked forward to receiving members' proposals and comments on the draft text by the middle of April so that he could prepare a revised paper on the topic in time for the next part of the resumed session. On the subject of the late issuance of documentation, the Bureau would prepare a checklist of the documents and reports which had been requested by the Committee.

Completion of the Committee's work for the first part of the resumed fifty-second session of the General Assembly

63. **The Chairman** declared that the Fifth Committee had completed its work for the first part of the resumed fifty-second session.

The meeting rose at 8.50 p.m.